



Course report 2023

National 5 Philosophy

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 284

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 253

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|----|------------|------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|-----|
| A | Number of candidates | 99 | Percentage | 39.1 | Cumulative percentage | 39.1 | Minimum mark required | 56 |
| B | Number of candidates | 31 | Percentage | 12.3 | Cumulative percentage | 51.4 | Minimum mark required | 48 |
| C | Number of candidates | 30 | Percentage | 11.9 | Cumulative percentage | 63.2 | Minimum mark required | 40 |
| D | Number of candidates | 21 | Percentage | 8.3 | Cumulative percentage | 71.5 | Minimum mark required | 32 |
| No award | Number of candidates | 72 | Percentage | 28.5 | Cumulative percentage | 100 | Minimum mark required | N/A |

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team indicated that it was a fair paper that gave candidates a good opportunity to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

There was a variety of performance, with some candidates scoring very low marks and some achieving very high marks.

In the knowledge and doubt section, a few candidates did not attempt any of the questions on the tripartite theory of knowledge. Most candidates answered on Descartes rather than Hume and, on average, candidates who answered on Descartes scored slightly higher marks in the knowledge and doubt section.

Two questions in the paper did not perform as expected. The correct responses to question 1(b) were clear from punctuation alone, and this made it much easier to get full marks than was intended when the paper was set. Question 5(e)(ii) was more challenging than intended — responses suggested that it wasn't clear what candidates were expected to do to achieve full marks. Grade boundaries were unaffected by these issues, as question 1(b) made the question paper less challenging and question 5(e)(ii) made it more demanding, and so these impacts cancelled each other out.

Assignment

The removal of the assignment was maintained for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Arguments in action

This is the section of the course in which most candidates performed best. Most were able to access at least half of the marks.

Moral philosophy

Many candidates were able to achieve high marks in questions 5(a) and 5(b), showing a good understanding of utilitarianism and criticisms of the theory.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Knowledge and doubt

Some candidates either did not attempt or were not prepared to answer questions on the tripartite theory of knowledge and the infinite regress of justification.

Many candidates achieved fewer than half marks for the whole knowledge and doubt section but, in general, candidates were better prepared to answer question 3(a) (describe Descartes' method of doubt) than 4(a) (describe Hume's theory of knowledge). Many candidates achieved 7 marks or more for question 3(a), but few candidates achieved such high marks — and most were awarded fewer than half marks — for question 4(a).

In question 3(a), many candidates were not clear about the role of the malicious demon in Descartes' method of doubt. They attributed the extent of the doubt Descartes reached with the deceiving God argument to the demon. Some candidates claimed that Descartes needed to introduce the malicious demon because he believed God was too good to deceive him.

In question 4(a), many candidates were not able to describe the arguments Hume uses to support the copy principle.

Many candidates were not well prepared to describe criticisms of either Hume or Descartes.

Moral philosophy

Some candidates were not prepared to answer questions on any theory other than utilitarianism.

In question 5(e)(ii), many candidates repeated descriptive points about utilitarianism and/or their other moral theory. Many candidates did not compare the moral theories' reasons and so were not able to make a judgement about which theory's reasons were the most convincing.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Candidates should be entered appropriately and fully prepared to answer questions on all areas of the mandatory course content, as listed in the National 5 Philosophy Course Specification, available on the National 5 Philosophy subject page on SQA's website.

Knowledge and doubt

For session 2023–24, candidates should be prepared to answer questions on both Descartes and Hume. They must be able to describe the philosophers' arguments and comment on how successful they are. Teachers and lecturers should consult the course specification, which includes a detailed breakdown of the mandatory content.

The course specification provides detailed guidance on knowledge and doubt mandatory content. This includes information on what is meant by Hume's arguments on the origin of ideas. Teachers and lecturers should make candidates aware of this aspect of the mandatory content, to help them to identify what is being asked for in a question.

Many candidates struggle with questions that ask them to describe criticisms of Descartes' and Hume's theories. Candidates should be aware that the term 'criticisms' can refer to strengths, weaknesses, or both. Teachers and lecturers should discuss criticisms with candidates to prepare them for this aspect of the question paper. Examples of the types of criticisms that candidates might discuss can be found in the 'Knowledge and Doubt additional support' notes. These can be found on the Higher Philosophy subject page on SQA's website, under 'Course support'.

The 'National 5 Philosophy model questions' resource demonstrates different approaches to answering questions on criticisms.

Moral philosophy

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on a theory other than utilitarianism. They should be as familiar with this theory, criticisms of it, and how to apply it to scenarios, as they are with utilitarianism. When candidates see the term 'other moral theory' or 'another moral theory' in a question, they should know what to write about.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should be aware that candidates will be expected to submit an assignment for session 2023–24. The coursework assessment task and previous course reports (up to 2019) provide advice about preparing candidates for the assignment.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).